

State University of New York College at Buffalo - Buffalo State College

Digital Commons at Buffalo State

Newspapers

The Dr. Catherine Collins Collection

9-20-2016

Newspapers; 2016-09-20; Buffalo News; Crafting Commons-sense Path to School Reform

Catherine Collins

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/collins_newspapers



Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

"Newspapers; 2016-09-20; Buffalo News; Crafting Commons-sense Path to School Reform." Newspapers. Monroe Fordham Regional History Center. Archives & Special Collections Department, E. H. Butler Library, SUNY Buffalo State.

https://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/collins_newspapers/21

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the The Dr. Catherine Collins Collection at Digital Commons at Buffalo State. It has been accepted for inclusion in Newspapers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons at Buffalo State. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@buffalostate.edu.

By MARC SANTORA,
WILLIAM K. RASHBURN, AL BAKER
AND ADAM GOLDMAN

NEW YORK TIMES

NEW YORK – The man who police said sowed terror across two states, setting off bombs in Manhattan and on the Jersey Shore and setting off a furious manhunt, was tracked down Monday morning sleeping in the dank doorway of a neighborhood bar and taken into custody after being wounded in a gunbattle with officers.

The frenzied end came on a rain-soaked street in Linden, N.J., four hours after the po-



Inside:

SUSPECT BECAME

A 'DIFFERENT
PERSON' AFTER

A TRIP TO
AFGHANISTAN.

PAGE A3

dangerous.”

Even as the remarkably swift arrest eased fears across the region, investigators were still in the earliest stages of trying to determine what provoked the attacks, why a street in Manhattan's Chelsea section was one of the targets and whether the bomber was aided by others. While investigators have been focused on the Afghan-born Rahami's actions immediately before and after the bombings, they were also working Monday to trace his activities and travel in recent months and years.

One law enforcement official said the

See **Bombings** on Page A3

Crafting common-sense path to school reform

By DEIDRE WILLIAMS

NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Everything is meticulously decorated in Catherine Fisher Collins' two-story home in North Buffalo.

A vast art collection fills entire walls, from a high-quality Picasso reproduction to a painting of her two adult children when they were younger. A basement wall is covered with photos of Collins

with newsmakers: Jackie Robinson's widow, Rachel; Cornel West, Mike Tyson, Hillary Clinton, publishing magnate John Johnson, Jesse Jackson and Kweisi Mfume, to name just a few.

Collins, 77, has climbed many professional ladders rung by rung by rung, starting with a health care career that took her from nurse's aide

See **Collins** on Page A10



**Whether
at home in
Buffalo or
in Albany,
Catherine
Fisher
Collins aims
to make a
difference on
state Board
of Regents.**

John Hickey/
Buffalo News

terries C2
MoneySmart D1
Situations C4
Union A8
Picture Page B12
Scoreboard B6
Sports B1
Television D6



WEATHER

Partly sunny, less humid. High
79, low 56. Details on Page C6.



\$1.00

To subscribe,
call (716) 842-1111

CONTINUED FROM THE COVER

Faced with balancing act of education challenges

COLLINS • from A1

to nurse practitioner to a position running all of Erie County Medical Center's clinics. As an educator, she was a dean at Erie Community College, where she was director of a nursing program and chairwoman of the Nursing Department. She was a professor at Empire State College, before retiring in May.

Collins also served on the Buffalo School Board from 2004 to 2009.

In other words, she brings a varied background and a wealth of experience to her job as a Regent – and she may need it.

Not only did the state Board of Regents become more pro-teacher in 2015, elections this past May created a Buffalo School Board that favors a New York State United Teachers agenda against a backdrop of a Buffalo school district badly in need of reforms often opposed by teachers.

That's the balancing act that Catherine Collins has stepped into over the last year.

'We reform too much'

Collins' appointment in March 2015 made her the first woman and the first African-American to represent Western New York on the Board of Regents. Her appointment unseated longtime Regent Robert M. Bennett, of the Town of Tonawanda, and – along with the appointments of three other new Regents – tipped the balance of the board to one viewed as more NYSUT-friendly. Asked about that perception, she said that one of her main objectives is to make sure that teachers see themselves as vital.

"I think the teachers want us to keep an eye on what's going on and let them know what's going on and understand how important they are," Collins said.

When she was appointed as a Regent, it was seen as a step back from reform effects by former state Education Commissioner John B. King Jr., who now is U.S. secretary of education. Collins said she has no problem with reform, per se. Instead, it's the way reform is implemented, she said. It makes more sense to build upon each change, then review it and find out if it worked before adding another reform, she said.

"My problem is that we reform too much. We never have a chance to catch up because we're always in a reform mode and they're always overlapping," she said, recalling a variety of initiatives. "No Child Left Behind and then Common Core ... and now we have this new one that's out. I haven't memorized the name because it's only going to be around for a short time before we're going to reform it."

There's a need to "back up, slow down," she added. "That's what I told the Legislature when they interviewed me, (that) I would not have implemented Common Core all at once. Common Core, for me, would have been two grades at a



John Hickey/Buffalo News

Catherine Fisher Collins' home in North Buffalo includes an abundance of photos of her with the many newsmakers she's met during her long and wide-ranging career. In her new role as a state Regent, she says, there's a need to "back up, slow down" on school reforms so further changes are made with "common sense."

time ... maybe third and fourth grade or either math one year and then English language arts ... so you can revise it as needed. What they did was they dropped it on the districts."

The move was very impractical, she said.

"Even in Common Core, they didn't use common sense," Collins said.

One of the problems is that parents do not understand that Common Core is not a curriculum. It's a set of standards "that gives you the basics to work towards a particular end," she said.

Currently, the Common Core Learning Standards are being reviewed by a committee of about 200 put together by the Regents that includes teachers, administrators, superintendents and "all kinds of folks," she said, adding that specific changes will come out of their report.

Teacher evaluations should not be tied to student performance, only because other situations that are out of a teacher's control can factor into why a child is not learning, the former School Board member said.

"I don't think we have worked out the wrinkles to tie a teacher's evaluation, because there are other variables that impact learning" such as a child's health and poverty level, she said.

"Take a kid with bad vision and you're the kid that's sitting in the back of the room that can't see the board. Or you've had too many upper-respiratory infections and you can't hear out of your right ear, and you're the kid who's sitting there acting out also in the back of the room. ... No one knows the child can't hear ... so they go into their own little world because of health," she said. "So those are the things that impact kids' learning. ... Somewhere, you have to include that in the analysis."

"Did all of your (students) have at least eight hours of sleep? Did they have a breakfast in the morning?

When your stomach's empty, there's something called brain drain. All of the energy from your brain drains down to your stomach. So we're talking about trying to educate these kids with all these other variables and then we're going to say, 'Well, the teacher is responsible for the curriculum.' But her kids have some deficits."

Collins said that there is a need to evaluate teachers, but that it isn't fair to put all the onus on them. Parents also share in the responsibility.

"We've been evaluating teachers forever. My problem is that we can't put all the responsibility of kids failing on teachers ... because it's more than the teacher that is responsible for learning. Parents have a really important role," she said.

Rating the Regent

Collins has her supporters, including both Buffalo Teachers Federation President Philip Rumore and Samuel L. Radford III, president of the District Parent Coordinating Council, who often see things very differently.

Rumore has known Collins as far back as her School Board days and says he trusts her.

"She's the kind of person that is not an in-your-face kind of person who's going to yell and scream. She's somebody who's thoughtful and really investigates the issues," Rumore said. "She's somebody I trust and somebody who gives great thought before she acts."

Radford also has known Collins since before her School Board days, but said she really made an impact when she began her tenure on the board, particularly from 2006 to 2009, when the Buffalo district made great strides.

"We took 13 schools off the failing list. We doubled both math and ELA scores," he said.

While it's hard to measure her impact as a Regent in such a short time, Radford pointed out that one of her strengths is that she listens and seems to be supportive of parents. He praised Collins for providing DPCC with access to her and State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia. That balances any shortcomings that Collins may have, he said, without answering what those shortcomings might be.

"Sometimes, it's hard for parents to get a seat at the table at the state level," he said, crediting Collins with making it "clear to Elia that if she was going to be effective as a commissioner, she needed to hear from parents right from the beginning."

Conversely, Larry Scott has not had much interaction with Collins, but he hopes that will change.

"More accessibility is one minor concern," said Scott, co-chairman of the Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization. "We've made attempts to reach out to her and have an opportunity to dialogue with her, but that hasn't happened yet."

Buffalo Public Schools enrollment is about 67 percent African-American and Hispanic, and their graduation rates are well below those of white students. Collins has a plan to bring onboard more teachers of color who already are familiar with the students and the school buildings: train teacher's aides.

Her plan to "grow our own teachers" is particularly important, given an expected teacher shortage.

"We want to put people of color in these classrooms. Where are these people? Already in the classrooms, already working with the Common Core curriculum. They already know our kids, already know the culture of the black and brown kids sitting in those classrooms," she said. "We

have an army of people of color sitting in these classrooms giving teaching assistance. Why can't we build a career ladder for them to move up? Have our teachers aides become our future teachers?"

Collins has already talked with the local teacher's aide union, as well as Assemblywoman Crystal D. Peoples-Stokes, D-Buffalo, and other Regents about the idea to see if it is worth exploring. The union was amenable, said Collins, who plans to present the idea in Washington in a couple of weeks at a national meeting on the issue of teacher shortage. And Peoples-Stokes wants Collins to do more research, so she is putting together a structure for the program.

"What I would like to see is a pilot (project) here locally," she said. "If we could get 30 or 40 teacher's aides involved in the program to set up a pilot, a structure, give them support, get their feedback."

Empowering parents

As for what she has accomplished so far as a Regent, Collins pointed to the Office of Parent Engagement that was born from a workshop she did last year. At the first meeting, the group talked about establishing a statewide Office of Community and Parent Engagement for parents. The office is responsible for things such as making sure that every school has a parent advisory council and a parent room where parents can go and pick up information. The staff in the office can develop policies that affect parents, such as a Parent Bill of Rights.

"How do you get that revised? And is your Parent Bill of Rights contrary to what we want at the state level?" Collins said. "It will be very useful for our state."

She helped secure \$2 million in state funding to create the office and hopes the money may trickle down to local districts for their parent and family engagement departments. Parent engagement is a problem statewide, in urban districts as well as rural ones, she said.

As for how her role as a Regent pertains to the Buffalo schools, Collins said she sees herself as a collaborator on what's going on in Albany and making sure the district gets the assistance it needs. She meets about once a month with Superintendent Kriner Cash.

"Whatever they ask me, I'll intervene," she said. "But I won't offer to get involved in a squabble or something like that. If it affects policy, if it's a kid that has something that happens to him because we have a raggedy policy that needs to be revised, then I will certainly get involved."

She's determined not to get involved in the infighting that the Buffalo School Board has been known for in recent years. "I am hopeful and prayerful," she said, "that they won't have that same anxiety."

email: dswilliams@buffnews.com